

REVIEWS

Llull, Ramon. *Romance of Evast and Blaquerna*. Trans. Robert D. Hughes. Barcelona and Woodbridge: Barcino-Tamesis, 2016, 564 pp.

The *Romance of Evast and Blaquerna* (*Romanç d'Evast i Blaquerna*) is one of Ramon Llull's most remarkable attempts to employ what we call literature to advance his reformistic and evangelical agenda. In this romance Llull, an intellectual giant of thirteenth-century Europe, showcases his high literary skills. He tells the story of a pious man, Blaquerna, who endeavors to reform Christendom by means of his actions in each of the institutions he joins, successively becoming a monk, an abbot, a bishop, and, finally, the pope. At the end of his ever-ascending career, Blaquerna fulfills his early wish to lead a contemplative life. But his compromise with the community does not end with his eremitic retirement. He still writes a book in the way of the sufis with the aim to "increase the fervor and devotion of the hermits." This mystical treatise, titled *Book of the Lover and the Beloved* (*Llibre d'Amic e Amat*), is composed of (almost) as many versicles as there are in a year, and is included in the fifth book of the romance. The same fifth book contains a short "Art of contemplation" to teach hermits how to "contemplate and raise their souls to God." The other main characters of the romance are also to be regarded as exemplary in the societal roles they play. The lives of Blaquerna's parents, Evast and Aloma, for instance, are a model for devout married laypeople (and, more specifically, but not exclusively, as they would exist in a Beguine community). Early in the romance, Aloma wants to prevent his young son from seeking a life of eremitic isolation. To that end, she introduces him to Natana, a young girl who, inspired by Blaquerna, ends up becoming a nun, and eventually the abbess of her community.

Llull drew on a variety of literary models to compose this unique romance of social and institutional reform. Hagiography is one of them. The lives of Blaquerna, Evast, and Natana mirror situations found in the lives of Saint Alexius, Homobonus of Cremona, Barlaam, Josaphat, and Claire of Assisi. The legends of Saint Francis inspired some chapters as well. Furthermore, the story of *Barlaam and Josaphat*, in which exempla and doctrine fill a sustained narrative, served Llull as a structural model. In fact, the many exemplary references to government probably indicate an original courtly readership, and most likely the court of John II of Majorca. This intended audience would also account for Llull's surprising

use of chivalric literature to frame many of the chapters of the romance, in which knights are the protagonists. Blaquerna himself embarks on a typically chivalric adventure by crossing a forest in search of a hermitage. Several of these passages resemble the *Prose Tristan*.

As in many other books in Lull's corpus, the dissemination of the *Romance of Evast and Blaquerna* in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was multilingual. There are extant Latin, French, and Occitan versions of the romance that derive from the Catalan original (and are actually crucial to reconstruct the first six chapters of the Catalan text, which have not come down to us). In modern times, Lull's romance has not ceased to be translated. It has been translated into Spanish, for example, by Miquel Batllori and Miguel Caldentey (1948, rpt. 2009); into Swedish, by Michael Nodberg (2002), into French, by Patrick Gifreu (2007), and into Romanian, by Jana Balacciu Matei (2011). Old and modern translations of the *Llibre d'Amic e Amat* are even more numerous. Lull's aphorisms have been translated into Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, Russian, Swedish, Norwegian, Polish, Czech, Finnish, and Hungarian. In the English language, the *Romance of Evast and Blaquerna* was translated by Edgar Allison Peers in 1926, whereas the *Book of the Lover and the Beloved* has enjoyed two more recent translations, by Eve Bonner (1993) and Mark Johnston (1995). Robert Hughes's translation renders Lull's work in a sober English prose that balances the author's plain syntax with his often times learned lexicon. Hughes's rendition of Lull's style conveys the author's ceremonious, yet modest, tone. See, for instance, the following passage, which corresponds to a chivalric scene at the beginning of chapter 52: "Blaquerna was travelling through the forest while remembering and loving his Creator and his God, and he was singing the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. While he was going along in this manner, he came upon a road along which he walked until the ninth hour, at which point he encountered a squire who was approaching very tearfully along a different path, and whose face showed signs of great sadness. Blaquerna asked the squire why he was weeping...". As for the *Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, Hughes conveys Lull's intriguing aphoristic versicles in a way that, as is the case in the original, no language obscurity is allowed to play any part in the meditation that the text purports to elicit. See, for instance, v. 232: "Tell us, Fool, which is the heavier and weightier burden: pain born of Love or pain born of Hate?" / He replied that the question should be addressed to those who perform penance either out of love or out of fear of torments of Hell."

The translator's abundant, though not overwhelming, notes offer timely clarifications of references to the medieval Church (from the meaning of the Divine Office, silent prayer, or the canonical hours, to that of the Beguine communities), cross-references to other works by Lull to which the romance relates, explanations of Lull's own thought (the spiritual senses, the meaning of the notion of *example*),

the form and meaning of some Catalan words in the original (*semblança, coratge, sitja, refrigeri*), and a few historical references. The volume is prefaced by the modern critical editors of the Catalan text, Joan Santanach and Albert Soler, who offer a thorough introduction to the significance of the *Romance of Evast and Blaquerna* in view of its structure, poetic referents, and Lull's intellectual pursuits. This book is another excellent addition to the Barcino-Tamesis collection of English translations of Catalan classics.

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Barton, Thomas W. *Contested Treasure: Jews and Authority in the Crown of Aragon*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2015, 292 pp.

Thomas W. Barton's masterfully executed study of the Crown of Aragon's jurisdictional authority over Jews between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries thoughtfully contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on the definitions of power, authority, and *convivencia* in the medieval Mediterranean. Barton's analysis centers on the neglected case of Tortosa, along with numerous other local studies, to examine how royal authorities shaped Jewish communities, and how local, seigniorial authorities governed both within and against the Crown and affected the relationships between Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

Barton coins the term "micro-convivencia," a nod to Peter Brown's "micro-Christendoms," to refer to the ethnoreligious relationships that were at the same time unified through the legal jurisdiction of the Crown of Aragon, as well as fragmented through the development of localized jurisdictions. Barton argues in *Contested Treasure: Jews and Authority in the Crown of Aragon* that the interactions between local and royal authorities in Tortosa significantly influenced the coexistence of Jews within Christian-ruled society, along with the development of royal and seigniorial authorities. Barton's comparative approach to Jewish-Christian relationships offers insight into how both competition and collaboration between royal and local authorities shaped the relationships between Christians and non-Christians, creating a more pluralistic view of *convivencia*.

The history of Jews in Tortosa dates back to the Visigoths, reaching its height under the tenth-century caliphate and vanishing in the eleventh century, most likely due to the arrival of the "less tolerant" (25) Almohads and Almoravids. After its capture in 1148 by Count Ramon Berenguer IV, Tortosa housed the powerful Montcada family and served as a center for the Knights Templar. The town's sizeable Jewish community served as a liaison between the Christian